

Ethical and Professional Dilemmas for Educators

Supplemental Scenarios
Culturally Responsive Teaching

Module 5

2021

Participant's Guide



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Introduction

The education profession is vested by the public with a trust and responsibility requiring the highest ideals of professionalism. Therefore, the educator accepts both the public trust and the responsibility to practice the profession according to the highest possible degree of ethical conduct and standards. Such responsibilities include a commitment to the students, the profession, the community, and the family.

Code of Professional Responsibility for Educators 2010 Preamble

Public school educators are held to high standards of behavior because they are entrusted with the well-being of their students. The public expects that their behavior exemplifies ethical and moral integrity. Teachers serve as role models who should recognize that their conduct, both on and off the job, can profoundly impact their professional image. Lapses in judgment can adversely impact students, damage teachers' credibility, and erode public trust in schools and the profession. Additionally, with advances in technology and greater access to social media, the challenges educators are likely to encounter have increased in recent years. Consequently, educators must develop a keen awareness and sensitivity to a variety of dilemmas and circumstances they may encounter in their daily contact with students, families, and the community. It is vital that educators make conscious ethical decisions to ensure that their professional practice meets the highest possible ethical standards of conduct and responsibility.

The purpose of this publication is to provide a collection of scenarios to help educators become more aware of the ethical dimensions of their profession. These brief scenarios provide educators the opportunity to engage in collegial discussions about situations that could result in career-threatening consequences. Although the descriptions provided are fictional, they are based on actual situations and cases that have led to negative consequences ranging from personal and public embarrassment to license revocation, termination, criminal and civil liability.

Please note, this activity has not been designed to unduly raise fears or to prescribe a specific moral/ethical code. It is intended to be a resource for educators to help discuss, recognize and analyze situations that could result in public and professional harm. For the purpose of these discussions, "educator" includes superintendents, administrators, teachers, special services professionals, coaches, substitute teachers, and paraprofessionals. Like most ethical challenges, some issues may have simple solutions while others will require educators to employ their best professional judgment.

Culturally Competent and Culturally Responsive Teaching

Context for discussing bias in the classroom

Often people interpret and react to situations based on assumptions about others. We all hold some form of bias due to socialization and cultural stereotypes that may be positive and manifest as unearned advantages, or negative which manifest as unearned disadvantages.

According to the Ohio State University's Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, implicit bias refers to attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. It is the opposite of explicit bias, which refers to attitudes or beliefs that we fully admit to in our discussions and actions, and intentionally drawn on and act on. Bias--implicit and explicit--leads to unearned advantages and unearned disadvantages, which can produce barriers to student performance, engagement, and behavior. These beliefs and attitudes impact how we relate to students and families. Unchecked, our biases can influence and determine whom we humanize and value. Studies have revealed that bias can impact how teachers view students, perceive their behavior, and respond to student behavior. Biased perceptions of students and their actions result in racial disparities in student discipline, particularly for discretionary, nonviolent school policy offenses. Bias can have a powerfully negative impact on teacher expectations, educational access and opportunities, academic achievement, and discipline referrals.

Cultural competence is understanding and having an awareness of one's own cultural identity and views about difference, and the ability to learn and build on the varying cultural and community norms of students and their families. Developing cultural competence helps us understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures. It supports respectful, trusting relationships.

Cultural responsiveness is the purposeful action taken to allow all students to share and take pride in their unique differences. Culturally responsive teaching means that the teacher is invested in and committed to making meaningful connections between what students learn in school and their cultures, languages, and life experiences. To do this requires educators to take the time to learn about each student and family. Authentic, respectful connections between students and help students understand the relevance between what they learn in school and their lives beyond school.

An important part of being culturally responsive is not only the ability to build trusting relationships with all students and their families, but also affirming them and validating their experiences. That means as culturally responsive educators we educate ourselves about all forms of bias – how it operates and what we can do to interrupt it wherever and whenever it manifests. Being culturally responsive encourages students to feel a sense of belonging and helps to create safe spaces where all children feel seen, valued, respected, and heard by teachers with high regard and expectations for them.

In this new section, we will explore several scenarios involving cultural competence and bias. In each situation, the outcome of the incident depends upon the judgment of the teacher which can be influenced by implicit and/or explicit bias. Negative outcomes are often the result of poor judgment on the behalf of teachers.

These scenarios are intended to offer an opportunity for self-reflection and examination of your own thoughts and beliefs, as you determine what the most appropriate course of action should be. Some of these scenarios may touch on sensitive areas. This is an opportunity to share your thoughts in a respectful and professional manner. We should all be committed to lifelong learning—especially to enhance the learning experiences of our students.



Scenario 1

Mr. G is a 9th-grade math teacher who has a generally good relationship with his students. He runs a tight ship and has a zero-tolerance rule for policy violations. A male student (Student D) came to class wearing a hat. Students are not allowed to wear hats in his class. Mr. G gave him a disapproving look and told him, “Take off the hat!” D just lowered his head and said in a very soft but polite voice, “I don’t want to.” Mr. G responded in a raised voice, “You know what the rule is in this class! Take off that hat!” By now all the students were looking at D to see what was going on. Some boys in the back of the class were whispering and laughing. D was generally a cooperative and respectful student. He again said but in a slightly louder voice, “Mr. G, please, I don’t want to.” Mr. G was now furious and told D if the hat didn’t come off, he was going to the principal’s office. D pleaded with Mr. G, “Please, I don’t want to take off my hat. Can’t I just keep on for today? You let M keep her hat on last week. Mr. G grew angrier and wrote him up for insubordination and sent him to the office.

Discussion Questions to Consider Regarding Students

1. What possible issues/concerns might this scenario raise?
2. Which sections of the Code of Professional Responsibility for Teachers and/or other school/district policies are applicable to this scenario?
3. In this situation, how might the teacher’s decisions impact the students, families, the teacher, and the school community?
4. What responses/actions would result in a more positive outcome(s) and/or what can the teacher do to rectify this situation?
5. What are some classroom management strategies a teacher could employ to address a situation such as this? How can teachers, maintain appropriate standards of behavior, while being culturally responsive to their individual students?*

*an extra question has been added to this scenario

Consider the following sections of the Code of Professional Responsibility for Educators: Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies Section 10-145d-400a

(b) Responsibility to the Student:

(1) The professional teacher, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the student, shall:

(A) Recognize, respect, and uphold the dignity and worth of students as individual human beings, and, therefore, deal justly and considerately with students;

(C) Nurture in students lifelong respect and compassion for themselves and other human beings regardless of race, ethnic origin, gender, social class, disability, religion, or sexual orientations.

(c) Responsibility to the Profession:

(1) The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the profession of teaching, shall:

(D) Strive to exercise the highest level

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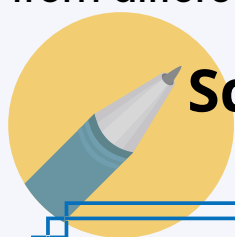
4. What responses/actions would result in a more positive outcome(s) and/or what can the teacher do to rectify this situation?

5. What are some classroom management strategies a teacher could employ to address a situation such as this? How can teachers, maintain appropriate standards of behavior, while being culturally responsive to their individual students?

CONTEXT FOR SCENARIO 2

Names matter

Names have meaning. Our names tell a unique story about who we are and where we come from. Correctly pronouncing, spelling, and respecting a student's name affirms the student's identity. When teachers mispronounce a student's name or make fun of it, it can have a lasting impact on the student's success, both within and outside the classroom. Culturally responsive educators know how important it is to respect their students' diverse cultures which includes respecting their names. Students who come from different backgrounds may have names that are not common.



Scenario 2

Ms. P teaches grade 6. She was taking attendance at the start of the day when a new student came into the classroom. Ms. P showed the young girl where to place her coat and belongings and instructed her to take a seat. She then asked the girl her name. The young girl replied in a soft voice, Chardonnay. The teacher looked bewildered and asked the girl to repeat her name. Thinking the teacher didn't hear her the first time, the student repeated her name a little louder "My name is Chardonnay." The teacher looked up and began to laugh. She then said, offhandedly and in disbelief, "like the wine? I know what your parent must have been doing!" All of the students in the classroom also laughed. Chardonnay blushed, looked down at the floor, and moved quietly to her seat.

Discussion Questions to Consider Regarding Students

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4. What responses/actions would result in a more positive outcome(s) and/or what can the teacher do to rectify this situation?

Consider the following sections of the Code of Professional Responsibility for Educators: Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies Section 10-145d-400a

(b) Responsibility to the Student:

(1) The professional teacher, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the student, shall:

(A) Recognize, respect, and uphold the dignity and worth of students as individual human beings, and, therefore, deal justly and considerately with students;

(C) Nurture in students lifelong respect and compassion for themselves and other human beings regardless of race, ethnic origin, gender, social class, disability, religion, or sexual orientations.

(c) Responsibility to the Profession:

(1) The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the profession of teaching, shall:

(D) Strive to exercise the highest level of professional judgment.

UNPROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

(f) The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the student, shall not:

(D) Emotionally abuse students.

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2. Which sections of the Code of Professional Responsibility for Teachers and/or other school/district policies are applicable to this scenario?

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CONTEXT FOR SCENARIO 3

“There’s evidence that when children have a strong, positive racial identity, they’re more academically and socially successful,” says Ali Michael, director of K-12 Consulting and Professional Development at the Center for the Study of Race & Equity in Education at the University of Pennsylvania and author of *Raising Race Questions: Whiteness, Inquiry and Education*.



Scenario 3

Ms. R is a 4th grade teacher. It is early December, and Ms. R has brought in books about Christmas. and put up some holiday decorations in her classroom for the season. One poster showed different holiday celebrations around the world. Most of the other decorations in the classroom are Christmas-related. She also created several worksheets with "fun" Christmas themes.

She loves to tell her students how much she loves Christmas and talks about her own family traditions.

In her class, there are four students from Vietnam, one Russian student, eleven African American students, one student from Ethiopia, and two from India.

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(b) Responsibility to the Student:

(1) The professional teacher, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the student, shall:

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(C) Nurture in students lifelong respect and compassion for themselves and other human beings regardless of race, ethnic origin, gender, social class, disability, religion, or sexual orientations.

(c) Responsibility to the Profession:

(1) The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the profession of teaching, shall:

(D) Strive to exercise the highest level of professional judgment.

(e) Responsibility To The Community:

(1) The professional educator in full recognition of the public trust vested in the profession, shall:

(B) Endeavor to secure equal educational opportunities for all children.

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1. What possible issues/concerns might this scenario raise?

2. Which sections of the Code of Professional Responsibility for Teachers and/or other school/district policies are applicable to this scenario?

3. In this situation, how might the teacher's decisions impact the students, families, the teacher, and the school community?

4. What responses/actions would result in a more positive outcome(s) and/or what can the teacher do to rectify this situation?

Final Reflection

Your facilitator may ask you to complete one or more of the following questions as a final reflection following the facilitated conversations.

1. What new insights or understanding have you gained from participating in the discussions about various ethical and professional dilemmas with your colleagues?
2. What does it mean to be culturally responsive and how does it affect your work?
3. How can you, as a teacher, be prepared to address potential dilemmas in your work?
4. If you are unsure about how to address a challenging situation involving ethics and professional responsibility, what could you do to help make the right decision?
5. What are some potential challenges that educators in your school/district might face, and what are some strategies you will use to address the situation so it will result in a more positive outcome?
6. Which of the discussions about professional dilemmas prompted you to reflect the most upon your actions, district policies, and possible consequences for educators? Why?

CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Code of Professional Responsibility for Teachers
Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies Section 10-145d-400a

(a) PREAMBLE

The Code of Professional Responsibility for Teachers is a set of principles that the teaching profession expects its members to honor and follow. These principles set forth, on behalf of the teaching profession and the public it serves, standards to guide conduct and the judicious appraisal of conduct in situations that have professional and ethical implications. The Code adheres to the fundamental belief that the student is the foremost reason for the existence of the profession.

The teaching profession is vested by the public with a trust and responsibility requiring the highest ideals of professionalism. Therefore, the teacher accepts both the public trust and the responsibility to practice the profession according to the highest possible degree of ethical conduct and standards. Such responsibilities include the commitment to the students, the teaching profession, and the community.

Consistent with applicable law, the Code of Professional Responsibility for Teachers shall serve as a basis for decisions on issues pertaining to licensure and employment. It shall apply to all teachers licensed by or individuals seeking licensure from the State of Connecticut. For the purposes of this section, "teacher" means a person who is applying for, who holds, or who is employed under a teaching certificate, or other equivalent certificate, issued by the state board of education.

(b) RESPONSIBILITY TO THE STUDENT

1. The professional teacher, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the student, shall:
 - (A) Recognize, respect, and uphold the dignity and worth of students as individual human beings, and, therefore, deal justly and considerately with students;
 - (B) Engage students in the pursuit of truth, knowledge, and wisdom and provide access to all points of view without deliberate distortion of subject matter;
 - (C) Nurture in students lifelong respect and compassion for themselves and other human beings regardless of race, ethnic origin, gender, social class, disability, religion, or sexual orientation;
 - (D) Foster in students the full understanding, application, and preservation of democratic principles and processes;
 - (E) Guide students to acquire the requisite skills and understanding for participatory citizenship and to realize their obligation to be worthy and contributing members of society;
 - (F) Assist students in the formulation of value systems and worthy, positive goals;
 - (G) Promote the right and freedom of students to learn, explore ideas, develop learning skills and acquire the necessary knowledge to achieve their full potential;
 - (H) Strive to develop within students fundamental critical thinking skills and problem-solving techniques;
 - (I) Remain steadfast in guaranteeing equal opportunity for quality education for all children, and not unlawfully discriminate; and
 - (J) Maintain the confidentiality of all information concerning students obtained in the proper course of the educational process, and dispense such information only when prescribed or directed by federal or state law or professional practice.

2. The professional teacher, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the student, shall not:
 - (A) Abuse his or her position as a professional with students for private advantage;
 - (B) Sexually or physically harass or abuse students;
 - (C) Emotionally abuse students; or
 - (D) Engage in any misconduct which would put students at risk.

(c) RESPONSIBILITY TO THE PROFESSION

1. The professional teacher, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the profession of teaching, shall:
 - (A) Conduct himself or herself as a professional realizing that his or her action reflects directly upon the status and substance of the profession;
 - (B) Uphold the professional teacher's right to teach effectively;
 - (C) Uphold the principle of academic freedom;
 - (D) Strive to exercise the highest level of professional judgment;
 - (E) Assume responsibility for his or her professional development;
 - (F) Encourage the participation of teachers in the process of educational decision-making;
 - (G) Promote the employment of only qualified and fully licensed teachers;
 - (H) Encourage promising, qualified, and competent individuals to enter the profession;
 - (I) Decline any gratuity, gift, or favor that would impair or influence professional decisions or actions; and
 - (J) Maintain the confidentiality of all information concerning colleagues obtained in the proper course of the educational process, and dispense such information only when prescribed or directed by federal or state law or professional practice.

2. The professional teacher, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the profession of teaching, shall not:
 - (A) Obtain licensure or employment by misrepresentation or fraud;
 - (B) Misrepresent his, hers or another's professional qualifications or competencies; or
 - (C) Engage in any misconduct which would impair his or her ability to teach.

(d) RESPONSIBILITY TO THE COMMUNITY

1. The professional teacher, in full recognition of the public trust vested in the teaching profession, shall:
 - (A) Be cognizant of the influence of teachers upon the community-at-large, and, therefore, shall not knowingly misrepresent facts or make false statements;
 - (B) Encourage the community to exercise its responsibility to be involved in the formulation of educational policy;
 - (C) Promote the principles and ideals of democratic citizenship; and
 - (D) Endeavor to secure equal educational opportunities for all children.

2. The professional teacher, in full recognition of the public trust vested in the teaching profession, shall not:
 - (A) Exploit the educational institution for personal gain; or
 - (B) Be convicted in a court of law of a crime involving moral turpitude or of any crime of such nature that violates such public trust.